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ABSTRACT

An anonymous poll concerning student activities was given to 1,325 undergraduate students at the University of Maryland to determine the kinds of activities in which students are likely to participate. Students showed little interest in large scale, organized, traditional types of activities, but seemed more interested in concerts, campus speakers, and student discussion groups. Student attitudes appeared to become more negative with age or increased exposure to the university, and female students were generally more interested in activities than males. (Author/HS)

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ATTITUDES TOWARD STUDENT ACTIVITIES

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Research Report # 10-72

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Summary

An anonymous poll concerning student activities was given to 1325 undergraduate students at the University of Maryland during Fall, 1971 registration to determine the kinds of activities in which students are likely to participate or attend. Students showed little interest in large scale, organized, traditional types of activities, but seemed more interested in concerts, campus speakers, and student discussion groups. Student attitudes appeared to become more negative with age or increased exposure to the University, i.e., freshmen were more interested in activities than were sophomores, etc. Female students were generally more interested in activities than males. More study needs to be done of student interest in activities, particularly in smaller scale, more informal types of experiences.

It is possible that the entire area of planning and developing activities for students has evolved well past the way that most student personnel professionals are oriented or equipped to provide. In essence student activities may have gone "underground" and students are providing themselves with their own activities. Horowitz and Sedlacek (1972) have called for a movement away from molar or broad based roles for student personnel workers to more molecular or specific individualized approaches to planning programs and activities for students. A large university is highly diverse on most characteristics and in essence is made up of many subcultures and life styles. Unless student affairs professionals are able to provide for this diversity, their roles will become even more tenuous than they are at present.

Many educators have supported the contention that extra-curricular activities are an important part of college education. Stroup (1967) felt that colleges have a responsibility for the developing personalities of the students and their assimilation of the codes and practices of society, while Hilliard (1963) saw extra-curricular activities as a laboratory for testing the ideas that are learned in the classroom. The student learns best through his experiences, and activities can provide a setting for learning group cooperation so needed in this complex society (Hilliard, 1963). Sprague (1961) emphasized that to gain maximum benefit from student activities, while preventing their endangering scholastic success, more must be learned about student attitudes toward activities, work, and the purpose of college.

Some studies have been done of student attitudes toward extra-curricular activities. Most have found student interest in activities declining, especially on large campuses (Reich, 1961). Students show less interest in large scale, traditional types of activities and tend to prefer smaller, more spontaneous, informal activities (Zissis, 1967; Bennecke, 1971). Johnson (1967) examined student interests by demographically divided groups and found that cultural events were attended primarily by single liberal arts upperclassmen, most attenders of athletic events were single male undergraduates, and social events were attended mostly by undergraduate females. At Northwestern University, upperclassmen displayed enthusiasm for fewer activities than freshmen (Northwestern University, 1968).

Given that at the University of Maryland it would be desirable to provide students with some extra-curricular activities to augment their educational experience, it would be most meaningful to consult the students as to the types of activities that they would prefer to participate in or attend. Then

an activities program could be planned that would best satisfy the students' stated needs with perhaps particular attention paid to special age or sex groups.

Procedure

An anonymous poll was given to a sample of 1325 undergraduate students at the University of Maryland after they had registered for their Fall, 1971 classes. The students were asked about their classification, sex, living accommodations, and interest in various campus groups, possible campus speakers, concerts and types of student discussion groups.

The responses obtained were organized in several ways. Tables were generated to show the frequency of each response (and its percentage) for each item on the poll for the entire sample. Then, separate tallies were made for males and females, and freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors to provide comparative data across sexes and classifications. A finer tally was done using the eight sex-classification combinations.

The same divisions were used in the calculation of means and standard deviations for each item, i.e., all, by sex, by classification, and by sex-classification combinations.

Finally, each activity listed on the poll was rank-ordered according to its popularity with the students.

Results

The mean score and standard deviation for each activity on the poll are presented in Table 1 by classification and sex group. Table 2 contains the differences required for significance ($p < .05$) for approximate N's across the range of standard deviations.

Most striking is the general lack of interest in the campus groups listed on the poll. All means were toward the disinterested end of the scale except

campus intramural athletics for freshmen and male subjects.

Students showed more interest in concerts, campus speakers, and discussion groups. James Taylor was the most popular artist listed, while Ralph Nader was an overwhelming first choice for campus speaker. Most students also showed interest in hearing the Jefferson Airplane, Brewer and Shipley, the 5th Dimension, Joni Mitchell, William F. Buckley, Senator George McGovern and Bobby Seale. Students were most interested in discussion groups concerning human relations, sexual awareness, self-awareness, sensitivity, and couples communication. They wanted little to do with weight watchers.

In general, younger students responded more positively to poll items, so that freshmen were more interested in attending or participating in activities than were sophomores, with seniors presenting the most negative attitude.

Female students reported that they were more likely to attend or participate in nearly all events. There were nine exceptions, several of which seemed obvious, draft counseling, athletics, campus radio station, ROTC, varsity intercollegiate athletics, campus intramural athletics, fraternity or sorority, and hearing Joe Namath, the Jefferson Airplane, and James Brown.

Discussion and Conclusions

That Maryland students voice little interest in traditional campus groups like yearbooks, literary magazines, political organizations, fraternities and sororities, campus newspapers, and ROTC; and newer organized activities like SDS, PACE, Zero Population Growth, and Women's Liberation, ties in with studies done at other colleges (Zissis, 1967; Bennecke, 1971) which concluded that students have less interest in the large scale, traditional types of activities and prefer smaller, more spontaneous, informal activities. Student interest in the informal activities was not really tapped in this study, except perhaps with discussion groups, but it might be speculated that University of Maryland students resemble

the others studied in this preference since their attitude toward the large, traditional activities was similar.

The decrease of interest in activities from freshmen to senior also agreed with previous research in the area (Northwestern University, 1968) which suggests that activities did not meet student expectations, so enthusiasm waned.

The results of the present study suggest more attention be given to activities like concerts, speakers, and discussion groups and more research be done on the kinds of activities that the students do prefer. There is a need to find out more about the smaller, informal kinds of activities that they may enjoy and then plan ways to provide more such opportunities for students. Hopefully, the data presented here can be used to aid in planning a meaningful and well-attended array of activities for undergraduate students at the University of Maryland.

It is possible that the entire area of planning and developing activities for students has evolved well past the way that most student personnel professionals are oriented or equipped to provide. In essence student activities may have gone "underground" and students are providing themselves with their own activities. Horowitz and Sedlacek (1972) have called for a movement away from molar or broad based roles for student personnel workers, to more molecular or specific, individualized approaches to planning programs and activities for students. A large university is highly diverse on most characteristics and, in essence, is made up of many subcultures and life styles. Unless student affairs professionals are able to provide for this diversity, their roles will become even more tenuous than they are at present.

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Table 1.

Student Interest in Different Activities *

CAMPUS GROUPS	Freshmen N=675		Sophomores N=285		Juniors N=267		Seniors N=91		Males N=676		Females N=590	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
1. Student Government Organization	3.17	1.06	3.82	.97	3.94	1.10	4.07	1.21	3.57	1.15	3.47	1.09
2. Campus Newspaper	3.52	1.06	3.63	1.18	3.77	1.32	3.99	1.33	3.68	1.16	3.57	1.17
3. Campus Radio Station	3.67	1.10	3.92	1.03	4.05	1.16	4.22	1.10	3.78	1.15	3.90	1.04
4. Campus Yearbook	3.62	1.14	4.01	.94	4.15	1.08	4.37	.95	3.97	1.05	3.73	1.14
5. Campus Literary Magazine	3.67	1.08	3.94	1.05	4.05	1.18	4.22	1.04	3.93	1.10	3.75	1.10
6. Anti-Racism Groups	3.48	1.18	3.76	1.15	3.86	1.19	3.96	1.25	3.72	1.21	3.61	1.17
7. Anti-War Groups	3.29	1.31	3.49	1.27	3.59	1.42	3.76	1.34	3.54	1.34	3.33	1.31
8. Drama (University Theater)	3.38	1.34	3.33	1.25	3.54	1.38	3.80	1.47	3.67	1.28	3.18	1.36
9. Music (Glee Club, Choir, Bands, Madrigals, etc.)	3.66	1.30	3.67	1.22	3.93	1.27	4.09	1.26	3.91	1.18	3.56	1.36
10. Religious Organizations/Clubs	3.64	1.27	3.73	1.23	4.04	1.19	4.19	1.14	3.91	1.17	3.60	1.31
11. Fraternity or Sorority	3.48	1.29	3.86	1.31	4.15	1.34	4.42	1.07	3.70	1.32	3.79	1.33
12. PACE (A community service volunteer activity)	3.27	1.11	3.45	1.24	3.73	1.28	4.08	1.17	3.72	1.11	3.16	1.23
13. SDS (Students for a Democratic Society)	4.05	1.09	4.25	.96	4.41	.91	4.54	.92	4.28	.98	4.10	1.07
14. Women's Liberation	4.20	1.11	4.11	1.11	4.22	1.07	4.29	1.10	4.45	.94	3.90	1.18
15. Draft Counseling Service (Serve as a counselor)	3.84	1.21	3.99	1.12	4.22	1.11	4.24	1.13	3.73	1.24	4.26	1.02
16. YAF (Young Americans for Freedom)	3.84	1.11	4.25	.92	4.49	.90	4.48	.89	4.13	1.05	4.07	1.07
17. Campus Young Democrats	3.86	1.12	4.08	1.00	4.39	.98	4.33	1.09	4.09	1.08	3.98	1.09
18. Campus Young Republicans	4.06	1.04	4.24	.93	4.44	.97	4.40	1.03	4.20	1.03	4.18	1.01
19. ZPG (Zero Population Growth - an environmental action group)	3.47	1.23	3.47	1.24	3.77	1.30	4.15	1.15	3.74	1.19	3.42	1.29
20. ROTC (Reserve Officers' Training Corps.)	4.38	1.02	4.53	.85	4.61	.93	4.59	.97	4.30	1.10	4.66	.76
21. Varsity Intercollegiate Athletics	3.51	1.53	3.74	1.46	3.89	1.45	4.03	1.46	3.57	1.49	3.78	1.52
22. Campus Intramural Athletics	2.97	1.47	3.39	1.45	3.56	1.49	3.80	1.49	2.87	1.48	3.66	1.40
CAMPUS SPEAKERS												
23. William F. Buckley	2.51	1.17	2.41	1.28	2.49	1.32	2.72	1.48	2.51	1.28	2.49	1.21
24. Representative Shirley Chisholm	3.10	1.11	3.06	1.25	3.16	1.36	3.20	1.50	3.31	1.19	2.88	1.22
25. President Wilson Elkins	3.05	1.10	3.25	1.17	3.42	1.32	3.40	1.46	3.23	1.23	3.14	1.15
26. Senator George McGovern	2.59	1.20	2.49	1.31	2.51	1.36	2.74	1.36	2.65	1.30	2.48	1.23

Table 1. Continued
Student Interest in Different Activities*

	Freshmen N=675		Sophomores N=285		Juniors N=267		Seniors N=91		Males N=676		Females N=590	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
CAMPUS SPEAKERS (Cont.)												
27. Ralph Nader	2.14	1.19	1.96	1.18	2.04	1.20	2.30	1.45	2.15	1.24	2.01	1.16
28. Joe Namath	3.16	1.42	3.19	1.43	3.29	1.47	3.62	1.50	3.08	1.48	3.39	1.37
29. Bobby Seale	2.80	1.32	2.89	1.41	3.05	1.50	3.30	1.57	2.96	1.45	2.85	1.34
30. Senator Strom Thurmond	3.15	1.15	3.02	1.27	3.16	1.35	3.43	1.48	3.20	1.28	3.11	1.19
31. General William Westmoreland	2.96	1.31	3.07	1.34	3.21	1.43	3.14	1.51	3.12	1.39	2.97	1.31
CONCERTS												
32. Jefferson Airplane	1.95	1.12	2.10	1.32	2.12	1.39	2.55	1.63	2.07	1.31	2.07	1.23
33. James Taylor	1.73	1.11	1.80	1.14	2.11	1.45	2.49	1.60	2.04	1.31	1.69	1.16
34. Brewer and Shipley	2.79	1.20	2.78	1.29	2.94	1.44	3.09	1.56	2.85	1.32	2.83	1.28
35. James Brown	3.25	1.32	3.47	1.28	3.61	1.32	3.53	1.54	3.33	1.37	3.45	1.30
36. Joni Mitchell	2.62	1.27	2.42	1.28	2.67	1.40	2.86	1.58	2.81	1.31	2.37	1.32
37. 5th Dimension	2.30	1.32	2.48	1.37	2.76	1.44	3.00	1.61	2.60	1.41	2.34	1.36
38. Percy Faith	3.38	1.24	3.35	1.31	3.54	1.28	3.40	1.49	3.46	1.28	3.35	1.26
39. Van Cliburn	3.32	1.24	3.18	1.35	3.27	1.40	3.22	1.53	3.31	1.31	3.25	1.32
TYPES OF STUDENT DISCUSSION GROUPS												
40. Human Relations	2.54	1.16	2.69	1.20	2.91	1.31	3.38	1.45	2.93	1.26	2.45	1.17
41. Sensitivity	2.69	1.21	2.83	1.29	2.97	1.33	3.40	1.44	3.03	1.26	2.61	1.27
42. Sexual Awareness	2.59	1.18	2.88	1.29	3.04	1.31	3.41	1.43	2.89	1.29	2.71	1.25
43. Couples Communication	2.74	1.19	3.12	1.30	3.14	1.29	3.46	1.45	3.05	1.27	2.85	1.27
44. Racial Awareness	2.81	1.27	3.05	1.27	3.18	1.30	3.52	1.43	3.10	1.33	2.87	1.27
45. Drugs	2.90	1.31	3.12	1.29	3.15	1.35	3.69	1.36	3.11	1.32	3.00	1.34
46. Weight Watchers	4.06	1.16	3.81	1.27	3.91	1.28	4.09	1.23	4.31	.98	3.63	1.33
47. Self-Awareness	2.63	1.25	2.84	1.30	3.02	1.42	3.51	1.43	3.08	1.34	2.52	1.26

* 1 = Almost certain to attend or participate; 5 = Almost certain NOT to attend or participate. N's do not sum to 1325 due to missing data.

Table 2.

Differences Between Means Required
For Significance With Various Sample
Sizes (N's) and Standard Deviations

N ¹	N ²	SD ¹	SD ²	Difference Required for <i>t</i> test (<i>p</i> < .05)
600	600	.76	.76	.07
600	600	1.63	1.63	.16
270	270	.76	.76	.11
270	270	1.63	1.63	.23
90	90	.76	.76	.19
90	90	1.63	1.63	.40
600	600	.76	1.63	.12
270	270	.76	1.63	.18
90	90	.76	1.63	.31
600	270	.76	.76	.09
600	270	1.63	1.63	.20
600	270	.76	1.63	.13
600	270	1.63	.76	.17
600	90	.76	.76	.14
600	90	1.63	1.63	.30
600	90	.76	1.63	.17
600	90	1.63	.76	.29
270	90	.76	.76	.15
270	90	1.63	1.63	.33
270	90	.76	1.63	.21
270	90	1.63	.76	.29